



September 5, 2017

Dear Committee on Tourism and Outdoor Recreation,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 4781 and HB 4782 regarding the use of electric bicycles or e-bikes. As e-bikes gain in popularity, I applaud the efforts to update the law to respond to land managers concerns and users who seek guidance on appropriate places to ride.

My name is Andrea Ketchmark. I'm the Executive Director for the North Country Trail Association.

Outdoor recreation is a critical industry, nationwide and in the state of Michigan. Further, Michigan has an incredible trail network that offers Diversity of experience, use, terrain and landscapes. This diversity is our strength and we should continue to strive to meet the needs of the public to provide new opportunities to recreate and for transportation. Clearly e-bikes fill a need in both areas. We must make room for ebikes and also strive to protect the experience the trail currently provides for the existing users as well as balancing that with the sustainability of the trail itself and the health of the environment.

NCTA supports the legislation in concept. We want to see more people recreating and using bikes for transportation. But we also have reservations about how the current language will impact the North Country National Scenic Trail given our complex management structure.

The North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) was authorized by Congress in 1980 under the National Trails System Act to create a non-motorized trail highlighting the scenic, historic, cultural and ecological wonders of America's northern heartlands. Traversing 4,600 miles across seven states from New York to North Dakota, the NCNST is one of only eleven National Scenic Trails, and is the longest in the system.

Unlike traditional National Parks and unlike its sister trail the Appalachian, the National Park Service does not own the trail corridor. Instead, they rely on state and local agencies and private landowners in seven states to host the trail and volunteers to develop, build and maintain it. We have more than 160 different land management partners along the length of the trail, hundreds of private landowners and thousands of volunteers all working together in this vision.

In Michigan, the route of the NCNST extends 1,150 miles, through the Lower and Upper Peninsulas, traversing 24 Counties. 366 miles of federal land and 300 miles of Michigan state land as well as county, city and private land. The management of the trail is a true public-private partnership. 1,034 miles of the NCNST has also been identified as the hiking route of the non-motorized Iron Belle Trail. It's one of the state's most visited trails and prime recreation experiences.

We have two suggestions about how the bill language could be improved:

1. We understand that this bill does not allow e-bikes on natural surface trails unless the local authority or agency of the state makes that decision. We support this but are concerned about the process for decision making on multi-jurisdictional trails. I urge you to be clearer on the authority needed to make these decisions.
2. Although the majority of the NCNST is a natural surface hiking trail, more than 50 miles of the trail in Michigan is routed on multi-use paths like the Battle Creek Linear pathway, Baw Beese Trail, White Pine Trail and the Little Traverse Wheelway. The language would allow Class 1 e-bikes on all linear paved trails as defined unless the land manager prohibits it. Adding e-bikes to these sections of trail will cause the National Park Service to rescind the certification status of these sections as a National Scenic Trail. For this reason, we urge you to add language stating that all e-bikes would be prohibited on trails with National Scenic Trail status.

In summary, in accordance with Federal law, The North Country Trail Association does not support e-bikes on the North Country National Scenic Trail. We do however believe there is a place for them in our transportation and trail system. We support legislation that recognizes the complexities of trails in our state, especially multi-jurisdictional trails, and finds appropriate ways to engage new users while supporting the existing users and managers.

I'm eager to work with the trail community and the bill sponsors to ensure that all trails and trail managers and trail users are considered in this process.

Sincerely,



Andrea Ketchmark  
Executive Director  
North Country Trail Association

CC:

Mark Weaver, National Park Service, North Country National Scenic Trail Superintendent